

## **Ghost 242**

Chapter 242: gift from the heart

The palace carriage rolled steadily through the wide streets of the capital, its wheels making a soft rhythmic sound against the stone road.

Inside, Lian An leaned slightly toward the window, lifting the curtain just enough to peek outside.

The moment the carriage left the palace gates, the atmosphere changed.

The air felt lighter.

Freer.

Vendors shouted from both sides of the road.

"Fresh buns! Hot buns!"

"Silk scarves! Finest quality!"

"Jewelry! Imported jade!"

Children ran between stalls, laughing.

The smell of roasted chestnuts and sweet pastries filled the air.

Lian An smiled.

"I missed this."

Across from her, the maid sat carefully, while guards followed closely outside.

Her three ghost companions floated beside her, equally interested.

Fen Yu pressed her face toward the window.

"So lively..."

Wei Rong crossed his arms.

"Too crowded."

Li Shen adjusted his sleeves.

"This is where real life happens."

The carriage slowed as it reached the central market.

Lian An tapped lightly.

"Stop here."

The guards immediately obeyed.

The maid looked slightly concerned.

"Your Majesty, please be careful."

Lian An smiled.

"I will."

She stepped out of the carriage, her cloak covering most of her royal attire.

Still, her elegance could not be hidden.

Even in simple disguise, she stood out.

The market was alive with movement.

Colorful stalls lined the streets.

Lanterns hung overhead.

Merchants called out loudly to attract customers.

Lian An walked slowly, looking at everything with interest.

"I need to find something meaningful."

Fen Yu floated beside her.

"Yes! Something romantic!"

Wei Rong scoffed.

"It's a wedding, not a drama."

Li Shen chuckled.

"Let her choose."

After walking for a while, Lian An stopped in front of a jewelry shop.

The display caught her attention.

Inside, delicate chains, jade pendants, and golden ornaments were neatly arranged.

She stepped inside.

The shopkeeper immediately bowed.

"Welcome, Miss. Please take a look."

Lian An moved toward the display.

Her eyes landed on a pair of matching necklaces.

Simple.

Elegant.

Each had a small jade pendant carved into a subtle heart shape.

Not overly flashy.

But meaningful.

"This one," she said softly.

The shopkeeper smiled.

"A perfect choice for newlyweds."

Lian An picked up the chains carefully.

"They're simple... but warm."

Li Shen nodded approvingly.

"A symbol of quiet affection."

Fen Yu clasped her hands dramatically.

"So romantic!"

Wei Rong rolled his eyes.

"Just buy them."

Lian An smiled faintly.

"I'll take them."

She paid using her own money.

Not palace funds.

Not the Emperor's gifts.

Just her own.

As the shopkeeper wrapped the necklaces carefully, Lian An felt satisfied.

"This is enough."

But the moment she turned to leave—

Fen Yu suddenly grabbed her sleeve.

"Wait!"

Lian An narrowed her eyes.

"What?"

Fen Yu pointed at another display.

"I want that!"

Lian An followed her gaze.

A delicate hairpin made of silver and jade.

It was beautiful.

But—

Lian An crossed her arms.

"You're a ghost."

"What will you do with a hairpin?"

Fen Yu pouted.

"I can still admire it!"

Wei Rong suddenly spoke.

"If she gets one, I want something too."

Lian An turned slowly.

"...You too?"

Wei Rong pointed toward a display on the wall.

A small decorative miniature sword ornament.

"I want that."

Li Shen coughed lightly.

"If we are making requests..."

Lian An stared at him.

"You too?"

Li Shen pointed calmly at a calligraphy set.

"A good ink pen would be appropriate."

Silence.

Lian An looked at all three of them.

"You three..."

Fen Yu clasped her hands.

"Please!"

Wei Rong nodded.

"We helped you."

Li Shen added calmly.

"It would be fair."

Lian An sighed deeply.

"You're unbelievable."

But in the end—

She turned back to the shopkeeper.

"I'll take these too."

The shopkeeper smiled brightly.

"Excellent choices."

Soon, the hairpin, miniature sword, and pen were carefully wrapped along with the necklaces.

As they stepped out of the shop, Fen Yu spun happily.

"I have a hairpin!"

Wei Rong smirked.

"A sword suits me."

Li Shen nodded.

"This pen is acceptable."

Lian An shook her head.

"You three are worse than children."

Fen Yu laughed.

"But you still bought them!"

Lian An smiled faintly.

"...Yes."

She held the wrapped gifts carefully in her hands.

One set for her cousin and his bride.

Three unnecessary—but somehow meaningful—items for her ghost companions.

As she walked back toward the carriage, her heart felt warm.

These were not political gifts.

Not royal obligations.

Just simple things chosen by her.

For the people—alive and not—who were part of her life now.

As she stepped back into the carriage, she looked once more at the lively market.

For a brief moment—

She felt like an ordinary person again.

And she liked it.

Chaos in the Carriage

The palace carriage rolled forward again, leaving behind the lively noise of the market.

Inside, the space should have been calm.

Elegant.

Quiet.

Instead—

It was chaos.

Lian An had barely settled into her seat when the arguing began.

"I told you that sword suits me best."

Wei Rong crossed his arms, glaring at Fen Yu.

Fen Yu immediately snapped back.

"Suit you? It's tiny! It looks like a toy!"

Wei Rong scoffed.

"It's symbolic."

Li Shen adjusted his sleeves, holding the wrapped pen like a scholar guarding his life.

"A sword does not need size. It represents authority."

Fen Yu rolled her eyes dramatically.

"Oh please, both of you are ridiculous."

She lifted the small box containing her hairpin.

"This is clearly the best."

"It's elegant. Beautiful. Refined."

Wei Rong looked at her blankly.

"It's useless."

Fen Yu gasped.

"Useless?!"

"Yes," Wei Rong replied calmly. "It has no function."

Li Shen nodded thoughtfully.

"He is not wrong."

Fen Yu turned toward him in betrayal.

"You too?!"

Li Shen spoke calmly.

"A hairpin has aesthetic value."

"But the pen..."

He lifted it slightly.

"...has intellectual value."

Wei Rong smirked.

"And the sword has power."

Fen Yu stared at both of them.

"...You two are impossible."

Lian An closed her eyes slowly.

"I just bought all three."

"Why are you fighting?"

Fen Yu turned immediately.

"Because mine is clearly the best!"

Wei Rong snorted.

"Delusional."

Li Shen coughed lightly.

"This is a matter of perspective."

Fen Yu leaned forward.

"Fine. Let's compare."

She pointed at Wei Rong.

"Your sword is small."

Wei Rong replied instantly.

"It is not small."

"It is compact."

Fen Yu raised an eyebrow.

"That's what people say when something is small."

Li Shen tried to hide a smile.

Wei Rong's eye twitched.

"It represents strength."

Fen Yu waved her hand dismissively.

"It represents decoration."

Wei Rong leaned forward.

"Say that again."

Fen Yu leaned forward too.

"Decoration."

Lian An rubbed her forehead.

"This is exhausting."

Li Shen cleared his throat.

"Let us evaluate logically."

Fen Yu turned to him.

"Yes, scholar. Speak."

Li Shen lifted his pen.

"A pen shapes thoughts."

"It writes history."

"It carries knowledge."

Wei Rong nodded slightly.

"That is acceptable."

Fen Yu crossed her arms.

"But can your pen make someone fall in love?"

Li Shen paused.

"...No."

Fen Yu lifted her hairpin proudly.

"This can."

Wei Rong stared at her.

"It's a piece of metal."

Fen Yu glared.

"It's art!"

Wei Rong shrugged.

"My sword can protect."

Li Shen added,

"My pen can guide."

Fen Yu lifted her chin.

"My hairpin can enchant."

Silence.

Then—

Wei Rong burst out laughing.

"Enchant?"

Li Shen coughed to hide his laughter.

Fen Yu's face turned red.

"You two are bullying me!"

Wei Rong smirked.

"You started it."

Fen Yu turned toward Lian An dramatically.

"You see this?"

"They're attacking me."

Lian An didn't even open her eyes.

"You attacked them first."

Fen Yu froze.

"...That's not the point."

Li Shen spoke calmly.

"Let us conclude."

He looked at both of them.

"Each item reflects its owner."

Wei Rong crossed his arms.

"Explain."

Li Shen pointed slightly.

"General Wei Rong—strength and combat."

Wei Rong nodded.

"Correct."

Li Shen turned to Fen Yu.

"Fen Yu—beauty and emotion."

Fen Yu smiled proudly.

"Of course."

Li Shen lifted his pen.

"And I represent intellect."

Lian An finally opened her eyes.

"...That actually makes sense."

Fen Yu beamed.

"See? Mine is the best."

Wei Rong immediately interrupted.

"No."

Li Shen added calmly.

"Not necessarily."

Fen Yu's smile dropped.

"Why not?!"

Wei Rong replied,

"Because strength is more useful."

Li Shen added,

"And intellect is more valuable."

Fen Yu looked at both of them in disbelief.

"...I regret asking."

Lian An laughed softly.

"You three will never agree."

Fen Yu crossed her arms.

"I don't need them to agree."

She held her hairpin box close.

"I know mine is the best."

Wei Rong smirked.

"Keep believing that."

Li Shen nodded.

"Confidence is important."

Fen Yu glared at both of them again.

Lian An shook her head, smiling.

"You three are worse than children."

But despite the noise—

Despite the endless arguing—

The carriage felt warm.

Alive.

Filled with laughter.

For the first time in a long while, Lian An leaned back comfortably.

Listening to their bickering.

And smiling quietly.

Because somehow—

This chaos felt like family.